

Passing years can't slow a man o' pairts

By Roddie Macpherson

A MAN o'pairts is a good Scots term and one that is very apt for one resident of Avoch, as is the name of his house – "Glencoe" – for Jim Thomson's life has encompassed climbing, football, competitive singing, piping, and dealing with the aftermath of doodle bugs during World War II. His working life has also been varied.

Jim has lived in Avoch for 40 years. He grew up in Springburn, Glasgow, in the 1920s. Football was his passion. He played centre forward for Petersfield Juniors, a famous professional team. He is often seen sporting a scarf with his team colours of maroon and white, so don't confuse him for a Hearts man!

But before his football career blossomed, there was the matter of war to deal with. Jim had not long begun his apprenticeship as an electrician, when World War II started. He was called up in 1943. After completing an electrical course at RAF Henlow, he was drafted to a station which, in effect, was a village-type hall in Richmond, London, the purpose of which was to secure homes damaged by buzz bombs and V2 rockets, so that they could remain habitable, before permanent repairs could be effected. Then, he was moved to the south coast and served as a Fleet Air Arm electrical mechanic, on Corsairs, US-built fighter planes.

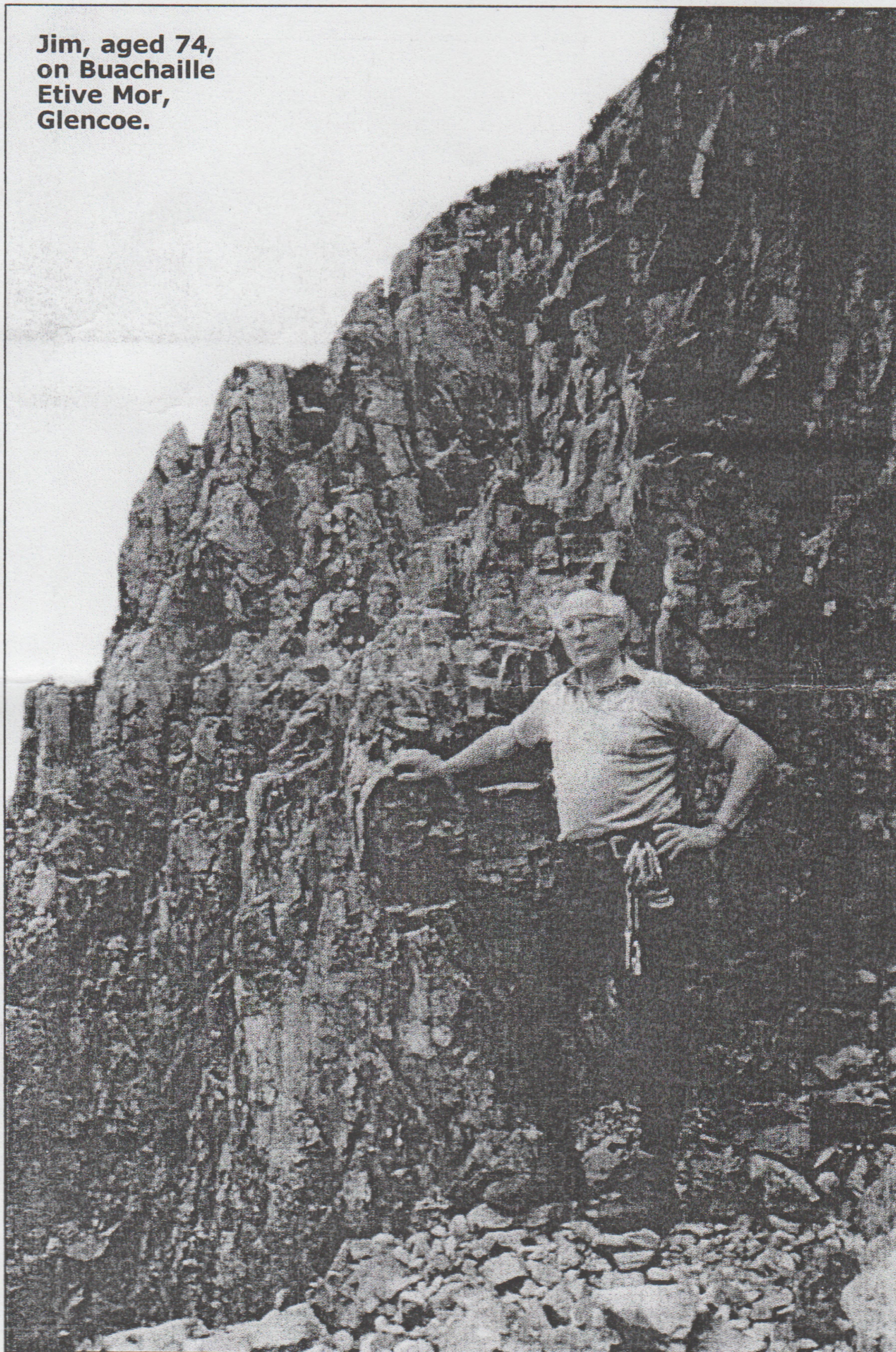
After the war ended, Jim was demobbed relatively quickly as his trade skills were vital to the need to rebuild Britain. He returned to Glasgow and recommenced his trade and football careers.

In those days, most folk had to work on Saturday mornings, so with his football and work he had little free time. However, Jim enjoyed getting into the hills. He knew nothing about climbing, but while hill-walking began to watch rock-climbers and thought "I'd like to do that". Once he discovered that he had a natural ability, Jim decided to give up football and spend as much time as possible gaining more expertise in his new hobby.

In 1953, he joined the Lomond Mountaineering Club. Jim is modest about his climbing feats, possibly because he was amongst a group of contemporaries who became formidable exponents, such as John Cunningham and Hamish MacInnes. However, he was no slouch and was leading Very Severe climbs, the most difficult grade in Scotland at the time. He has climbed extensively in the Alps, Corsica and the Balkans.

In the 1950s, Jim had become a top charge hand as an electrician. He also started part-time weekend work at an outdoor centre at Garelochhead, taking groups of youngsters onto the hills. In 1965, he made a major career decision to undertake a full-time two-year course at Jordanhill College for a

Jim, aged 74, on Buachaille Etive Mor, Glencoe.



Youth and Community Worker qualification. After working in Dumbarton and Kirkintilloch, Jim moved to a job with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders Youth Club (previously a Boys' Club) at Planefield Road, Inverness.

At his retirement in 1989, Jim was in charge of Highland Council's community education for a large part of Inverness-shire.

Another of Jim's interests is singing. He was a member of the Inverness Opera company and, for 20 years, sang in the very successful Inverness

Gaelic Choir. He was amongst the singers at the opening of the Scottish Parliament.

Jim is an active person. Apart from his daily 'constitutional' around the harbour, Jim regularly goes up Ladyhill (he times himself!) and, at least once each year, has ventured up to the top of Ben Wyvis, among other hills. And he still finds time to contribute to this magazine, do his housekeeping, and keep in touch with his family and friends.

Next year, Jim will celebrate his 90th birthday.